



House Committee on Transportation

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities & Coalition of Texans with Disabilities Joint Comments on Interim Charge #3: Texans with Disabilities and Autonomous and Semi-Autonomous Vehicles September 17, 2020

My name is Lauren Gerken, and I am a Public Policy Analyst with the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). Established by state and federal law, TCDD is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

My name is Chase Bearden, and I am with the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD). CTD is a statewide cross-disability advocacy organization composed of individuals and families of children with disabilities whose purpose is to promote positive public policies to ensure that persons with disabilities may work, live, learn, play, and participate fully in the community of their choice.

Together, TCDD and CTD see the role that autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles could play in giving Texans with disabilities greater access to employment, education, and upward economic mobility. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide public comment on Interim Charge #3, related to the study of the technology and safety aspects of autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles (AVs). As Texas explores the early stages of implementing AV technology, now is the opportune moment to consider its potential impact on the disability community.

AVs and Disability: The Conversation So Far

At national and state levels, disability experts have been pleased to see that disability has been an integral part of the AV discussion from the beginning. Sheryl Gross-Glaser, director of the nonprofit Community Transportation Association of America, was cited in a *VentureBeat* article published this past August which discussed the implication AVs have for the disability community. She cited AVs' value and potential for increasing independence, but also the needs for consideration:

"...we need redundant technologies that serve people with auditory or visual impairments and technologies and designs that assist people with cognitive disabilities. Those exist, and they should be used in designing autonomous vehicles so that all autonomous vehicles will be accessible." ¹

1. Wiggers, Kyle. (2020, August 21). *Autonomous vehicles should benefit those with disabilities, but progress remains slow*. VentureBeat.
<https://venturebeat.com/2020/08/21/autonomous-vehicles-disabilities-accessibility-inclusive-design/>

In Texas, the Texas Connected and Automated Vehicles Task Force and Texas Department of Transportation have had in-depth discussions regarding AVs' safety and future, and have included Texans with disabilities in those conversations to some degree. They acknowledge that AVs, if appropriately implemented, can reduce isolation and increase the inclusion and independence of people with disabilities.

The Next Steps

TCDD and CTD support and urge the inclusion of people with disabilities in proactive accessibility planning in the development stages of AV implementation in Texas. As an agency, TCDD has received feedback from community members during stakeholder meetings who indicate that transportation accessibility often meets the minimum standards set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, those standards do not necessarily meet the community's needs because the planning and development did not actively include people with disabilities. This can lead to retroactive accessibility improvements, causing gaps in community inclusion and costing the state and local jurisdictions more money.

By including people with disabilities in the development stages of AV implementation in Texas, the state will support inclusive practices and save money by reducing the need for later improvements to meet accessibility needs.

Recommendations

- Texas should require representation from the disability community on AV committees and task forces. TCDD recommends at least one individual from each of the following populations be represented:
 - people with physical and mobility disabilities
 - people who are blind or visually impaired
 - people who are Deaf or hard of hearing
 - people who do not communicate verbally.
- Texas should collaborate with people with disabilities, commonly referred to as self-advocates, to develop accessibility standards for AVs in Texas before the technology is fully developed and rolled out to the public.

Thank you again for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact TCDD or CTD with any questions or if we can provide any additional assistance.

Lauren Gerken, M.A.
Public Policy Analyst
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities

Chase Bearden
Deputy Executive Director
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities